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ABSTRACT

This qualitative research report focuses on the phenomenon of teacher burnout at the junior high school level. Three teachers were interviewed as to the role teacher burnout played in their professional and personal lives. A jury of peers reviewed the transcriptions of these interviews and categorized interview data into five categories: How was burnout defined? What were the types of burnout reported? What efforts were expended to alleviate its effects? and, What were the symptoms? The results are reported for those factors agreed to by all three members of the jury. The report concludes with observations concerning burnout at the junior high school level, suggested future research possibilities, and action steps public shool personnel (administrators, teachers, students) might undertake to combat its debilitating effects. (Authors)

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New England Teacher Corps Network

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TO: The Educational Community

FROM: Deans' Council

DATE: July, 1980

RE: A Study of Teacher Burnout at the Junior High School Level
Charles Rathbone, University of Vermont
Chaunce Benedict, Montpelier School District

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, EDUCATION & WELFARE
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A Study of Teacher Burnout at the Junior High School Level

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A Collaborative Research Study
sponsored by The New England
Teacher Corps Network Deans' Council

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Abstract

This qualitative research report focuses on the phenomenon of teacher burnout at the junior high school level. Three teachers were interviewed as to the role teacher burnout played in their professional and personal lives. A jury of peers reviewed the transcriptions of these interviews and categorized interview data into five categories: How was burnout defined, What were the types of burnout reported, What were the causes of burnout, What were its symptoms, and What efforts were expended to alleviate its effects. The results are reported for those factors agreed to by all three members of the jury. The report concludes with observations concerning burnout at the junior high school level, suggested future research possibilities, and action steps public school personnel (administrators, teachers, students) might undertake to combat its debilitating effects.

Preface:

This exploratory investigation would not have been possible without the assistance of several talented people. Their willingness to take time from their busy schedules and share their knowledge with us was very much appreciated.

We are grateful to the three teachers who agreed to be interviewed for our work. To Conrad, Jessica, and Phillip, we are indebted. What you did for us was not easy and we want to acknowledge your efforts.* We believe you have contributed to the base of knowledge concerning what is known about the phenomenon of burnout.

And we must also thank the jury of peers who helped analyze our data. Debra Rake, Tom Carney, and John Burton of the Browns River Middle School, Underhill Independent School District, Underhill, Vermont lent their professionally informed opinions graciously and for that we are thankful.

Finally, our typists Barbara Matthews and Mary List. Transcribing squawky tape recorders and interpreting scrawled handwriting taxes one's patience. Thank you for your patience.

We have both grown in this collaborative effort. Hopefully, the reader will understand that what follows could not have been accomplished separately by either of us. The strength of such an effort is that it unites skills which often are segregated into public school and university settings. We are grateful to Sara Massey and the New England Teacher Corps Network of Deans' for the opportunity to pursue this research.

C.R.
C.B.

*Conrad, Jessica, and Phillip are pseudonyms. Because of the nature of the interview material, we all thought it best that these three teachers remain anonymous, known only to us and themselves.

Introduction:

We have decided to break with tradition in our format for reporting this research. Normally, interview data would be included in the Appendix of the research report. In this case, we have decided to place the interviews "up-front." The interviews are human documents. Since burnout is a very human phenomenon, we felt it important that the interviews with Conrad, Jessica, and Phillip lead our report of this research. Should the reader not wish to read these interviews, the reading of this report should begin with Section Two, page 35 . Our feeling, however, is that neglecting the interviews will detract from the human quality of what is to be reported. We strongly urge that anyone interested in the phenomenon of burnout start their reading with the pages that immediately follow.

Section One

Interview with Conrad

June, 1980

Conrad Let me go from when I got out of college...When I first got out I got a job in a school, a seven through twelve position, teaching mathematics. In somewhat an open school idea, as far as how they put the kids through the curriculum, going through at an individualized pace. Doing the progression that way rather than the other way (studying a particular curriculum in a traditional way) offered both, alot of flexibility. It didn't have the open walls, but had closed in classrooms. Those were two good years of experience. I felt very good those first two years and the situation was one of the best I've been in. Because it offered both a traditional and an individualized curriculum, which it seemed to me alot of kids needed. The ones who wanted to be real structured could be and at times when you wanted to be structured, you could be... and there were other times when a kid would need to go slower or faster than the average kid and that went well.

The other thing I liked about the actual teaching assignment was that I taught a variety of subjects. I would be doing seventh grade in one period, then I'd do calculus and advanced math the next period down the hall. Within a couple of minutes, I was shifting tremendous gears. I think some people I know who I have talked to say they couldn't do that, it would be too much, but for me, it really kept things lively and exciting. I guess that's what was a contrast for my next job. I moved because we didn't want to live in the other side of the state; it was a choice of lifestyle. Living around _____ was important. I took any position I could get near _____ So the next job was straight algebra. Every day. Algebra. No geometry, no advanced math, no seventh grade, just the same couple years' age range plus the same material every day. I started feeling like it was the same thing day in and day out. After a year of that, I was ready for anything different because of the boredom of that same thing. There were times I did very innovative things, but the range of the material was narrow. I was burning out very quickly. I didn't really jump out of it because of burnout. I wanted to get my graduate degree and had applied for that. At the same time, I got connected with the state department to do this internship. I think after I'd been out a little while, I started feeling better, but I realized on hindsight that I had been burning out. I said, hmm, I wasn't feeling that good, the monotony of it, and some of the discipline was a problem, too. I wasn't getting the back up at the front office, there were some really discipline problem kids. And I wasn't the only one in the school. There were many people in the school saying that this is not working.

Q What is the nature of that backup?

Conrad It's a support function - organizing the school and situation, the school functions, people get to school and class on time, shifts go right, the overall kind of thing I felt wasn't happening, people straggling in late, taken out for various things all the time, and the overall functioning didn't seem to work right.

Q So it wasn't solely discipline?

Conrad There wasn't the support. I never got visited the whole time I was there. Nobody ever came in and said this is good or this isn't good. I don't know, I just felt like I was all alone. Teachers didn't come in much either, which was different. The first school I'd been in, the teachers were very friendly, a real comraderie, we worked together, we had alot of meetings after school and had a good rapport. In the second school, it was just once or twice a year or it wasn't there at all. You did your thing and everyone else did theirs and you closed the door and that was it. So when I got out a couple of things happened. One thing was that I got into my first "desk" job situation.

It was a real contrast between desk jobs and teaching jobs and I really liked it . It was very pleasant for awhile. All the secretaries were very nice, "How are you today? You look nice," etc. The first thing when you come in with a kid, they notice you're missing a button or your colors don't match or your shirt is corny, etc. It's a sort of half empty, half full thing, kids always notice what's wrong with you. The people at the new job seemed to notice what was right. Not always, but... The majority of the vocal kids criticize. The quiet ones might say you look nice. That was the most I ever got out of them. Never, "Hey, you look really good today." Most of the kids will find some weakness and then they'll say "You're missing that or you know that doesn't match." But in the office everyone was so nice and said "please" and "thank you." That contrast really struck me and what occurred to me was that being in a public school setting for a few years, you sort of get dragged through the mud. If enough kids criticize you long enough, then your ego goes - zap!

Q Is that peculiar to junior high settings, do you think?

Conrad I think it's intensified in a junior high setting. In the elementary school and high school, it's not so much, but there's a stage where I think kids are very critical — of looks, of their friends, everything, it's a critical time. It doesn't happen in elementary schools, things are positive and when kids get older in high school, they do get a little more grown up about their criticism. But the junior high age kids I think are flexing their critical powers. They'll just look for something to come along and they'll criticize it. Yeah, that's definitely there in junior high!

Then after I consulted for a year, I did want to be back teaching. I really enjoyed the desk job as far as the job went, but my time, that was another thing. That was another thing that could have potentially caused burnout for me, the time constraint. The day went very fast now, whereas when I had a desk job I could structure all my time all day long. I could be very creative with that. "Right now I feel like doing that so I'll do this and that and later on something else." When you're a teacher you say, "I've got this class, so I've got to have it now." Whether you feel good or not. There just isn't

much time to creatively reflect on things. Even when you get home you have to get ready for the next day or react to the day before. That was a contrast that really struck me. But at the same time, I wanted to be back with the kids, I really missed the kids. I missed the interaction. Adults were fun to a point, but...So I thought, well, I had the opportunity to go into a Title 1 remedial program, teaching math and I thought that would be an interesting setting. I've always felt a certain amount of remorse when I've been with a group of twenty or twenty-five because it's a bothersome thing when you always feel you didn't do what you could for them. You try really hard, and you can't do it, and they know it and let you know, sometimes vocally, and sometimes just the look in their eye. You didn't show them enough or it was too hard or whatever. So, I thought I'd try some small group stuff. I enjoyed that a great deal, one year part time and the next year full time, grades 1 through 6, very different, very lovable kids. Good attitudes about their school work and you and people in general. What they were doing. They were neat people and I enjoyed it alot.

A couple things that did bother me about the position I had at that time was the fact that remedial work is not in the center of the action. You're located off somewhere. When something's going on in the classroom, your class gets cancelled. I need to be right in the middle of things more and this was too much on the boundary.

Q You felt like an add-on?

Conrad Yeah, I felt like a supplement. The notices never got to you. You'd find out an hour before that there was an assembly. There wasn't enough communication with the administration. Some of it was just the nature of the thing. I can see it now. They're just always going to be that way. That's the job. When you're a remedial teacher, you're a supplement. And I, after a year or two of that, looked for another position. I would have taken a remedial position, but I felt drawn to be back in a classroom with my own group, that I could really own. In the remedial thing, you borrow the kids. "I'm gonna borrow you for an hour and then you're gonna go back." It's an envious position because you get alot of praise. You work in small groups, take the kids out of the classroom, and I was always doing something more exciting than what was going on in the classroom, but that was the nature of what my job was. The kids would say, "Wow, this is alot more fun than what we're doing in the classroom." And that's a real problem because it puts the teacher in a funny position because she's gonna go, "Gee, I'm glad you feel that way. But I want you to feel that the other person is doing a good job, too." Because they are, and they're doing the right thing. I do the same thing when I'm back there. I don't always do fun and gamey things all the time. You can't when you're in the classroom. Sometimes you can, but there are times when you've gotta hit the workbook. That's a fact of life. Well, the kids didn't see it that way. They saw it as every time they weren't with me it wasn't fun. I got alot of very amazing praise at the time.

That was nice.

When I got back here this year, I really wanted to hit the middle school again. I really think it's an important time. That's my feeling. Its a frustrating time, a very busy time. My day is unbelievable, with alot of decisions to make in each hour. Unbelievable. I have to be here about quarter of eight. And it's an awful long homeroom. It's not until eight thirty that things really get going. From eight thirty until when they leave at three fifteen, there isn't a minute's rest. Sometimes groups of twenty, twenty-five, other times the whole group of one hundred or more. You're out on the playground with them and also at lunch, so I don't really have breaks from the kids to speak of. I have two free periods a week that I can really call mine and some study halls and things like that. Forty minutes a week. Twenty minute periods. No, it's longer than that. Two forty minute periods, eighty minutes a week.

Some of the time problem's my own design because I took a Challenge Group here. It's a group that's working on a computer we got through a grant. I've given two of my free periods for that. So I would have had four, yet it would have been still slim compared to high school. High school, you have one prep and one free period a day.

Q Do you think you are ready to define "burnout?"

Conrad What burnout is? Yeah, let me try. The burnout seems to me to be a reduction of your ego, that's one thing. You feel like your efforts aren't expended and getting any return. Everyone has to get some return for their work whether it's verbal praise or success with the kids.

In education, success can be very separate. Sometimes you can see or feel it and other times it's happening, but you can't feel it at all. It's such a gradual thing. There are so many failures that go into a given success that often you don't feel it. It's hard to have that day after day.

I think burnout also happens because of mounting family, social pressures around education. I don't think education is a very prestigious thing to be in these days. It's social pressure. Very few people say, "Gee, that's nice, you're a teacher," and they'll never "ooo and ahh" like for a bank president or an IBM executive, or a company owner. It's okay, you're probably clean and straight, but you're not smart. Right? You get it from other parents, alot of people that have views on education that are different than yours or they're the same, but they'd implement them differently and telling you how to do your job. That gets to be difficult. That can include the administration.

Q By implication, you're doing your job wrong.

Conrad Yeah. Alot of people don't come right out and say that, but it's the implication that you're not doing your job the way

they would do it or they would see you doing it. Those two things, the social and the ego things, show most for me.

It takes tremendous energy, the decisions we have to make. Constant, can be very draining.

It takes alot of structure, too. Your life has to be really structured. I have to keep things like an army to get through the rest of my day at home even. You know you've gotta get those things corrected, you've gotta get those plans made and those materials made for the next day. The time at home has to be really budgeted. There's little free time for yourself. That includes weekends, I've spent alot of hours on weekends just preparing. If the week is gonna go smoothly, then you have to do that. To be able to sit down and watch the news now and then, you have to be structured.

Your social life suffers. It's a real job of contrast. Then you'll get a vacation, a long period of free time. So your time has to be super structured and other times, you really cut loose. That's difficult. Especially with the family. My wife sometimes wants to be doing things when she's got loose time and I don't. You get to a point between your job and your family. I don't know if that's constant with other jobs, but it seems a big pressure in education. It can cause burnout.

Money is a big question. I don't think it's as big a pressure, I don't know, it doesn't bother me as much because I've decided that it's a lifestyle change. It's something you can deal with by just consciously changing your lifestyle and compromising. But you do continue to get pressure, you always will, I think.

Q Something like you've got to always be financially aware of what the next expense is going to be?

Conrad Oh, yeah. There's no fat. Some of the pressure, too, is I'm not giving my family the lifestyle that I had. I'm living below the lifestyle that I grew up with. I can't maintain the lifestyle my parents had. I'm not trying to, it doesn't bother me, it bothers my wife more. It bothers the families more than me. I made the decision that I don't want necessarily to be doing that. But it bothers me in that you can't lead a pretty rich life and be doing what you want to do. In reality, it's hard to accept, that when you choose to do the thing you love to do, that doesn't necessarily mean you're gonna live life in a fairly well-off manner.

Q Do you mean rich "voluntarily" or "in providing things that you want?"

Conrad Not rich, but a normal life. Being able to go out occasionally, provide decent food, a good house, that kind of stuff. So money's a pressure, but it varies. Sometimes it doesn't bother me at all, but other times... Maybe during the summer it's nice because it seems like you're getting that money for free (laughs). But in the winter it seems like you've been teaching forever and the paycheck never changes. That was a

real pressure this year because our budget was tight. It was easier when my wife was on a salary. But now she sells real estate and when it's down, I feel very down about my responsibility and about my profession. That can be a real problem. If you're down long enough it can lead to real depression. It seems to always remedy itself, though.

Something that's gotten some strokes from me is the ego thing. Your ego always gets taken down in teaching. That's even with the most successful group I've been with. Maybe I take the failures too seriously. But the failures, I feel, "Gosh, I didn't make it," or a guy walks out telling me I'm a crumb, you know. Then you feel really bad about it. Enough of those and I could leave the job. The thing that gets me up is coming up with the approaches to work with kids, keeping active and learning new things yourself and then going and teaching other teachers because they give you lots of strokes.

Q Are you a RAP agent?

Conrad Yeah, have been for two years. That has really helped, that exchange, watching their classrooms, seeing that they've got the same kind of problems and some good solutions that you've never even thought of. Some have problems you don't have. It has helped a great deal, that kind of reflection, thinking about what they're doing and what you're doing. Taking some time off that way.

Q That's one of the things you get from being a RAP agent.

Conrad I'll spend the whole mornings in classrooms watching people, then I'll spend the afternoon giving a workshop. I get things when I do the workshop, too. They always generate new ideas that help me in my teaching, but also sometimes I hear someone say, "Gee, that's really good, I never thought of that." It makes me feel really good to help someone else that way. I need it and I know they do. There's an ego balance. That's helped me alot. Taking courses at the University doesn't do it as much as giving them.

Q Why are you in it?

Conrad Why am I in it? (Pause) It's a hard thing to pin down. It's magic. I feel magic with them. It's not a power thing. I don't like power over kids. I guess it's an excitement when I show them something they don't know and we really get psyched about it and can go with it. I'm fascinated with people as they grow up and I enjoy being with them, watching them change as they grow up.

Q Is this age an attraction for you?

Conrad Yeah. Even though this age is particularly tough. They need tremendous things. They need much more than anyone ever gives them. Alot of attractions can be double edged. The attraction is that they do need so much and they're changing so fast and going through so much. But at the same time, it's

tiring. Causes you to get really tired, they are so demanding. I like it for alot of other reasons, too. I like having the time to spend with my family in the summer. That's a big thing. I'm very frank about it. I've been in the office situation eight to five every day. But in teaching, I can get a big block of time with my family. I've made that a big value in my life. It's something I didn't get when I was a kid. So I made the decision that if nothing else happened in my life, I was gonna give time to my family. Because the family is more important than anything else. That was an early decision. So, I think that's a good reason for why I teach.

Also, it allows me to manage my life a little bit and gain some self-sufficiency. You get a big chunk of time off, you can build something, a house, raise animals, adventure, travel. That's something I need in life and I don't think I'd get it eight to five, in that type thing. These factors are definitely important, though they were more important the first couple of years teaching than they are now. As far as my need for them. During the school year when I first started teaching, I could hardly wait for June. I couldn't wait to get out of there. I don't feel that now. I feel like I'm in a real rhythm, like when you get your second wind. When a vacation comes now, I say, "Gee, that's great," but I don't need it. I'll take it! But I don't feel this, "Phew, I'm so glad," that I did the first couple of years. Some of it is skills I've picked up and some of it is that I'm just more comfortable with what I'm doing. It works. There's a rhythm.

Q It sounds like you've grown into this job.

Conrad I think if I'd been here two or three years ago, it could have had potential to burn me out quickly. Where I am now seems to work. I wanted to come back and really be involved. It's a fast moving, very committed school. You've gotta really work, then they're all gone and that's it. It starts early and goes fast and furiously.

Some of my liking it here is where I've been. My perspective. I've seen other teachers, I've been with the Department of Education, been a consultant, done workshops. I've done and been enough places to know that there's really no place that's idyllic. I think for alot of teachers burnout happens when they say it's gotta be greener over there. The solution is to be better and work harder where we are. Every situation has its drawbacks. You can't sit there and bitch and look for another place because the problems are always gonna be there. The problems are generally within yourself. I've gotten much more comfortable with it, and can say, "Well, that's not working so I've got to work on myself," rather than say, "Well, I give up, it's not for me!"

Q So, if some of those problems are within yourself, maybe a factor is your own expectations. What kids are capable of and what they can do and you can do for them. And maybe your different experiences have given you perspective on that.

Conrad Yeah. I guess when you get out of college you feel like you're gonna go out and show the light to the natives. That goes away. Fast. At least it has for me. Kids can react to that.

Q It can affect your relationship with kids?

Conrad Yeah. I also feel that seeing where they came from and where they're going developmentally helps. It's the expectations and continuity of seeing them age. And I know that kids aren't always the way they are in seventh and eighth grade. And that's important. Fresh out of college you start teaching seventh and eighth grade, you can get really bummed out about people. But when you realize it's an adolescent thing they're going through and they need alot of guidance, you see it as something that's a limited phenomenon. It's almost like you have to stand back and look at it with perspective. It's not that bad, and it's rather short lived and it's an amazing thing. I can work with it better that way.

I certainly know the skills now, which helps. When I first started I didn't know what they needed for the next day or what they had. Or what was expected. It was frustrating. Now there are more things I could do with them. There are always more skills that they need. I don't feel any real bad thoughts about where education's going right now. As far as basic comps. and stuff. I feel strongly about discipline. Kids seem a little more rowdie than when I was going through school. There's a little less self-control now. You can impose external control. If you have a voice and a little bit of technique, anyone can learn how to control a classroom. But to teach them to control themselves without you being there is a difficult thing and I see more and more kids lacking it. I think it used to come from when you were at home and with your parents.

Q That's clearly a value for you.

Conrad Yes, it's a value for me. Important. And I think it's important that society thinks it's important. It's the glue that kind of holds things together. That everybody takes personal responsibility. I see that really crumbling more and more. It goes from year to year. Some years I see really good things happening and other years I really see things coming down. It varies from places I've been, too. But that can be very difficult. When you're in a burnout situation especially. If you're trying to get kids to take responsibility themselves, you will just have a hard time doing that. And some parents, you talk to them and after awhile you understand they are the cause of that irresponsibility. They don't care, or feel "so what?" It's difficult. I thought for awhile parents were really...well, I still wouldn't do things some parents would. If they're not willing to help with self-responsibility, we'll never get it through to the kids.

Q Have you ever been burned out?

Conrad I can't say that I've ever really been personally. Well, it

depends what you mean by burnout. If it's the point where you go absolutely bonkers and just can't go on to the next day or that you really have to quit the job, or that you're running it 75% instead of 100%; I mean, you have to define that. There are times when I'm not running on full power, certainly. Sometimes I'm just kind of waiting for the next day or vacation or whatever. Personally, I deal with it by going home and going into a little "rock." Taking a walk or playing some rock music or doing some thing to get some personal time in. That's the key for me, to get some personal time in when it gets to a certain point. I just need to get away from people. Period.

Q Away from all the impositions on your time.

Conrad Yeah. I need to have free time to unwind. That can be very frustrating for my wife. There will be a task which she's set out for me and I won't get it done. Sometimes I'll do another one just because I feel like doing what I want to do. Often it's a much more difficult task, but I don't feel like doing what's been set out for me. Like the garden, things like that, less mundane work. Something with the environment. I used to play the guitar my first couple of years out, but not as much lately. Lately it's loud music or doing something with my hands. Loud music can help. Funny, because it's just the opposite of some people I know who go home and have to have it absolutely quiet. After a noisy day they need quiet. For me, I have to get into that "head set," that's critical.

In the long run, teaching courses has helped the most in preventing burnout. Even though workshops take alot of time and effort, to get prepared for them and do them, when I'm there I feel really good, and when I walk out I feel like, "Wow, this has been really helpful for everybody!" And it's almost a building back up process again.

Q So it sounds like you've "flamed out" occasionally, but never really burned out. (Sorry about that!)

Conrad No, I don't feel like I've totally burned out. If anything would cause me to leave the profession, it would be money more than burnout. I just can't be broke all my life.

Q Have you got some red flags that you know, when they go up, it's time to go home and turn up the music or work in the garden?

Conrad Yeah, when I start making alot of mistakes. When I'm doing my computation I'll start making alot of mistakes. That's a red flag. When I just feel like shoving everything aside, cram it all in the briefcase and get out, claustrophobic almost. That really can tell me I need something different.

Q Anything with the kids, or other teachers?

Conrad I get short tempered with the kids. I blow up at things I don't normally get mad about. Other times it'll be unwillingness

to get out of bed in the morning. That can be a cause of alot of things, cold and sick of chores. If that goes on for a week or two, every morning, I do get up, but it gets later and later, and I only have a cup of coffee in the car on the way to work, that's a signal that things aren't quite together. Because when things are together I go home and get organized for the next day and I get up on time and things go smoothly. There's a rhythm. And if the morning doesn't start off right, then the day goes blooey. And once you start getting up later, it just gets worse. The days get worse and worse. After awhile you have to start over and get up and shower and shave thoroughly and that will set it straight. Like this winter we ran out of water and I wasn't showering regularly. I'd get maybe one or two a week and I started to feel really yucky. It started to affect my teaching. I just didn't feel in the swing of things. I wasn't ready to do it. I wasn't psyched.

Q Was it the change in routine or did the overall rhythm get disturbed?

Conrad Yes, it really was. When we got the water back I felt better and really noticed the difference. The days I shower are better days than the days I don't. A shower in the morning really helps. You shower at night and it doesn't do ya any good. In the morning. Even though it's the worst thing, I hate it in the morning. The first thing I want to do is slouch at the table and read a newspaper. I don't want to hit that water in the morning. I don't want to shower. But if I do it, once I get out the day goes good. Things like that can really affect you. With this job, I've had to be much more aware of this kind of thing than ever before.

Also, there are no breaks. Kids are with you all day. Curtains drawn. When one class ends, the next one rushes in. And they're in there before the first one is out of the room. It's this constant coming and going in masses. There's no pause all day long. One filters out and the other in, wanting passes and "what's the assignment?" and "what are we gonna do today?" and "what did we do yesterday?" You got twenty questions while you're just trying to get your materials ready and start it! I found that I just have to be super organized. Sometimes I've had to change my style. Sometimes I've had to do the same lesson the whole day when I'd prefer not to. I have to make it an exciting lesson so I'm excited about it. But I just don't have the time to switch materials and the whole ballgame for each period. That's something to do with the age group. In junior high, they come in faster, and they have a million questions and everything's gotta be explained. Before you explain it, you have to explain it! (Laughs)

(Pause)

I think burnout is sometimes a self fulfilling prophecy type of thing. A teacher can sit around and talk about burnout and get burned out! You can reinforce it by talking about it. Not to say you should avoid it. You have to face it. But if you have it and have to face it, it has to be faced alone in many ways. Deal with it internally. Being with other teachers can't help, undirected teacher's room coffee talk can

cause you to get more burned out. Because you just talk about your nagging problems and they just talk about their nagging problems and it's just gonna get worse and get both of you convinced that everything's terrible. So I have avoided that kind of thing as much as possible. Even taking burnout workshops, I've taken ones that tell me what to do right with kids and what will help. I really feel very reluctant now to sit around and criticize what's going on. Unless it's gonna lead to something really productive, unless it's gonna lead to a "what do we do now?", which doesn't happen. I think it needs to happen. That's why I guess I feel good when I do workshops. I feel positive. I'm not gonna sit around and talk about what went wrong. Or what kids are having trouble with, I'm gonna talk about what we're gonna do. What works. What's positive. You gotta have it. Negative attitudes don't work with kids, they just don't. That's why I'm looking forward to having a new principal. The new positive principal is going to really help.

Q Is that more important than being structured?

Conrad It can be <u>as</u> important. The pat on the back is what it's all about.

Interview with Jessica

April, 1980

Interview with Jessica
April, 1980

Q Jessica, could you tell me if there is burnout in your school? And, if so, describe what you think burnout is. Describe what you see and what it is.

Jessica Okay, it's gotta be there because we had a workshop in February. We brought in someone from _____ to talk about burnout and just about the entire staff attended. It was the thing that most people were interested in all year. I guess I used to describe it as low morale before the term 'burnout' became fashionable. People just get real tired, complain alot and talk about all the paper work they have to do and complain that they cannot do anymore teaching - that they have to spend all that time doing paper work.

Q People are doing more kinds of things that they would really rather not be doing and less things that they would like to be doing?

Jessica Exactly. And alot of our teachers have been here for years and years, which I think contributes to it. I think some of them are just bored, or in a rut or need a change of pace or something.

Q Did the workshop help?

Jessica Well, it gave morale a boost because it put all those people who hardly ever see each other during the day in the same room and gave them a chance to laugh and smile together and compare notes. There were refreshments, which is always nice. People seem to respond to that. The man who came was _____ from _____ and he is largely trained in reality therapy. He described what he thought were the symptoms of burnout and got alot of recognition laughter from the audience.

Q What are some of them? You said there was low morale and you talked a little bit about it, just a second ago, which I thought was interesting, about isolation.

Jessica Fatigue.

Q People not caring, fatigue. Do you feel like I do that these teachers find it difficult to get away from school? That some of the things causing burnout are not only some of the things that are happening to them in school (isolation, too much paper work), but also not being able to leave school at school and relax.

Jessica Definitely.

Q This kind of thing.

Jessica Yeah, they tend to carry their jobs home with them in one form or another. And the other thing that seems prevalent is the feeling of powerlessness about the whole situation. People say "I'm burned out" and they don't see any way out of it unless the system changes - unless something comes down from the top that

says you don't have to do X, Y, and Z anymore.

Q How do you feel about that? Do you agree with that?

Jessica No, I don't.

Q But you think that's a pervasive feeling with some people? Talk a little bit about why you don't feel that way.

Jessica Yeah, well... I first heard _____ talk about burnout last fall. He did a workshop in the teacher center and I was just beginning to think of ways, in my own life, to get a handle on some things that were out of control.

Q In your teaching life?

Jessica Not only in my teaching life, but all around.

Q But were those things you talked about just a moment ago - powerlessness, not being in control, couldn't go on? Did you feel that the source of that feeling was basically your teaching, and your role as a teacher? And therefore maybe also as a person because of teaching?

Jessica It was taking over my whole life in alot of ways. So, I guess I seized on the idea that the only way out was to take some initiative myself. You have to start somewhere. _____'s technique - he usually does a couple of exercises to get people to clarify issues that feed their lives, things they take pleasure in and how they find recreation and figure out a way to expand that in some way. Or set a small goal for themselves. I've been doing that, well, not just as result of his workshop, but I've been applying the principle to alot of things this year and I find that I have alot less sympathy with people who say, "Oh, poor me, there's nothing that I can do" because I'm finding out that there are things that each one of us can do.

Q Do you think that other people took similar actions in their lives based on exposure to _____ and his ideas? Do you think other people are seeing what you've seen and trying some way to make an effort? Or do you think that burnout is a problem in the sense that people are just leaving teaching and continuing to say "it doesn't make any difference. I've gotta get out. I'm not going to try to make an effort to make it better myself." How do you see other people in respect to burnout?

Jessica Well, in my own situation, I only know one or two who are really trying to make it better for themselves. I know several who have just decided that school is school and I'm going to be here from eight o'clock to two thirty and that's it. They are not making any commitment whatsoever to do committee work or association work or extracurricular activities and things of that nature. And I guess they are probably saving their own sanity that way, but I don't think that's the solution either because it leaves alot of gaps in the spirit of cooperation in the school. There are people that you know that you absolutely cannot depend on to do anything extra. They are gone at two thirty - you won't even be able to find them, let alone get them to do anything.

Q Do you find that you have something that you want to do, some positive action that you want to take when you have to depend on (or work with) that type of person? Does that get in your way? Is that a problem for you?

Jessica It's only been a minor inconvenience up to this point. There aren't that many of them. And I'd say half a dozen in the half of the school in which I'm most acquainted which is the lower grades.

Q So, let's retract a little. You say that this is something that you find quite widespread, the feeling that there is something called burnout, people are experiencing it, people have gone to workshops, people have done alot of talking and thinking about it and some people, a few as you describe it, have taken some action to do something about it. Why haven't more people taken some action or why do you think that it's only a small bunch that have been moved into that category? It's got to be better and I'm going to make it better. What is it? What do you think?

Jessica Well, the thing that helps me the most to move in that direction is surrounding myself with other people who think the same way. People from outside the school system from whom I can get encouragement and I think encouragement in the sense of giving somebody courage to make changes in their lives is one of the big things that's missing for alot of people. _____ came and did a workshop and they had a good time, but then they had to go home and correct papers. They are having trouble seeing beyond those little day-to-day things. And there hasn't been alot of follow-up. It might still be interesting at some point to have _____ come back and do Stage 2 - a little consciousness raising or something. Because people are very comfortable in this role of victim.

Q That's very interesting. Go with that a little bit. What do you mean "people are comfortable?" I'm intrigued with that (and I have to be honest, I sometimes suspect that is the case with myself). A victim being a victim gives you as much of an identity as a persecutor being a persecutor (victimizing people). Could you explore that a little - that's a complex question.

Jessica I guess I chose the term because I've done some study of transactional analysis in the last couple of years and I took the term from there. I might not have chosen the term another time. But it's a way of not taking responsibility - if you can blame the system or if you can blame someone else for all the horrible things you're being asked to do, then you don't have to take the responsibility for changing them. And I think most people are scared by that responsibility. I still am.

Q Do you ever feel that this contributes to burnout or whatever? That there are responsibilities that you are being asked to take that you shouldn't? Is that a problem?

Jessica You mean because you don't know how to say no.

Q Yes, partly; but also these days, teachers are being asked to go much

beyond just the teaching function in their relationships with kids. Do you think that sometimes teachers find it threatening to confront some of the nitty-gritty problems that the human beings they work with have and that contributes to an avoidance of responsibility in some way? Or are we talking about something just a little bit more? Just ignoring it - just shutting down the blinds and saying I don't want to know.

Jessica Yeah, there have been so many things added to our job descriptions lately and nothing has been taken away to make room for the new stuff and I'm not sure why we have swallowed that.

Q I'm not sure either. You talked about encouragement. To pick another word that has an 'in' in it - incentive is one that I grouch about quite a bit. Are people, or you personally (however you want to answer this), concerned about money and payment and the financial incentives of being a teacher? Does that play a role in their feelings about themselves and their attitudes about their jobs? How seriously do they take it and how much responsibility are they willing to take?

Jessica Yeah, I would say so to some degree. We have gotten to the point where everyone who handles extracurricular activities is paid extra. This was negotiated into the contract several years ago.

Q This wasn't the case before?

Jessica Well, it's been in the contract for four or five years and I don't really remember back before that. I've only been here for seven years. I don't remember how long ago it was first put into the contract. There was alot of concern about salary this year when we negotiated. People just feeling that they couldn't keep up with the cost of living and I know that two of the teachers we are losing this year, we are losing for financial reasons. And a couple of them we are losing are just burned out - they are tired, they are sick of it - they just don't want to do it anymore. We're having a higher turn over this year than we've ever had before.

I lost my train of thought - I was going to say something about money. Oh, I finally decided this year that if they wanted me to do certain things, they would have to place more value on what they were asking me to do. They are in the process of restructuring the junior high curriculum and scheduling and there has been alot of talk as to who was going to put this monstrous schedule together and people kind of look at me side-long for I've been doing the eighth grade schedule which is fairly easy and fun. But I said if you want me to do the whole junior high during the summer, you are going to have to pay me for it. I haven't had any response to that yet. I think they are going to foist it off on the new assistant principal instead.

Q Has the new assistant principal been hired?

Jessica Yes.

Q I was trying to think of another question to ask you. Back to burnout. I think you described symptoms of the problem and causes of the problem

pretty well. Those workshops and the results don't seem to be terribly encouraging. There are as many people who are leaving as there are who really got a kick out of it. What do you think could be done aside from workshops, aside from meetings or sessions like that? Are some things possible to change about schools themselves that could make them less stressful, structurally, from within the school programs, scheduling, job descriptions? Could you talk about that whole issue? Are there things that are contributing to isolation for instance that could be wiped out to decrease our sense of isolation?

Jessica Yes, well...

Q Not you, but within the school. Let's talk about the person who has decided that this is just nine to five or eight to two or whatever. Is there hope for that person?

Jessica It's hard to think about that in the abstract without thinking about personalities.

Q Well, like I just said, to decrease isolation, what would you do within your building, within the time that you have?

Jessica Well, I can tell you what_____ and I recommended to the school after that vandalism conference. Our school has already been working along the lines of more consistent discipline policy and just having that is going to help people's morale some. Because teachers are feeling that discipline is very inconsistent and the administration is very likely to say, there's been too much writing on the walls -- tighten up on your kids. When you send some kid to the office for writing on the walls, they say don't do it again and then send them back to the classroom. So that's been a large concern of almost everybody and we are looking at adopting more of a reality therapy approach to discipline and one of the things that we requested for next year is some released time for training in that area. _____ and I recommended that to go along with that, we establish a system of small support groups where they would be deliberately mixed up with people that they don't normally see during the course of their day. People from different grade levels and some of the special teachers mixed up with the regular classroom teachers and set up some kind of minimal schedule for those groups to meet together and provide some training in how to use support groups once you've got one, so that people just don't sit around and bitch at each other about how awful everything is. Just getting people together is valuable. I think the_____workshop proved that. Seeing each other was as much of a boost as it was to have_____there to talk about burnout and when we have faculty meetings, it usually is to hear some edict being handed down from the administration and there are never refreshments. There is never a chance to sit and chat with each other and all these little things.

Q That can do alot to build up mutual understanding. I agree. I think those small social and professional conventions add up to a big nice picture (or a bad one, if they are non-existent). I know the conference I went to in _____ (where I saw you) did alot for me to be in a different place with different people with different ideas and it was a chance to think very congenially together with another group of

people about educational problems. It sounds like a good solution. I agree. We don't have that kind of thing here. What is a good descriptive word for this problem we are talking about?

Jessica I would tend to use burnout more to describe the people who have really reached the end of their rope. The ones who are definitely leaving and not about to return.

Q But there are stages on the way?

Jessica I would describe stages on the way more as discouragement and I think there is a cure for that, but the hardcore, really cynical people in my school are the ones who are getting out and the ones probably wouldn't go to the workshop in the first place, and if they did, would end up saying "boy, what a jerk he is" and laughing at him up their sleeves and that kind of thing. Just not willing to listen to him at all. Those are the people I think who are burned out. And their decision to leave is probably the healthiest one under the circumstances for everybody concerned.

Q I think we have that here. I think we have varying stages. Talk a little bit about some things you have done to ease up some of the things you have to do in terms of correcting papers, things like that.

Jessica My first decision was to unload the record keeping -- the reading record keeping, the math record keeping and the basic competencies -- all of the correcting and recording I have given to the eighth grade aide.

Q That's taken a great big load off of your shoulders!

Jessica Definitely. I have to check it once in awhile because my initials go on it. She doesn't have the authority to initial it, but she certainly is able. It is legitimate to use our aides. I have let kids correct some of their own assignments - the kinds of things where there is a right and a wrong answer. And I can read them out in class. They don't always pay attention. They cheat a little, but I think in terms of my mental health, which undoubtedly comes through to them, it is worth it. And in some ways, it is an advantage because it gives them immediate feedback on how they've done on a paper. And if there are questions, we can answer them right away. When I used to collect everything, it was sometimes two weeks before I would give a paper back and then they've forgotten what it was about. So pretty much the only thing I take home now is actual written assignments, compositions, creative writing assignments, those kinds of things. And I forgot to mention before, but a couple of years ago, I learned in a course I was taking where I read alot of James Moffet's stuff, the idea of having kids proofread each other's first drafts and I've used that ever since and I really do get better quality papers that way. I find less punctuation and misspelling than I used to because alot of that just gets ironed out in the re-writing process.

Q That sounds like it is accurate to say that one of the things that you've discovered is that the teaching function as you perceived it

when you began teaching was very much centered on you and that most responsibilities had to be handled by you and that is one way to cause burnout very quickly, to have things that way.

Jessica Yes.

Q That's very interesting. I can see that, too. By delegating authority, responsibilities to other people, you are taking the center away from you and the pressure comes off to a great degree.

Jessica Yes, I had to do that with my Association work, too. My original involvement with our Association was as editor of the newsletter. When it came time for thinking of other things I wanted to do, which last year was running for secretary and being on the negotiation team, it was very hard for me to give up the newsletter. It was like putting up a child for adoption or something.

Q Did you?

Jessica Yes, I did. I said if I'm going to do negotiating, then I'll have to give up the newsletter. Some other people took over. It is still getting printed and if I have something to say, I can write a letter to the editor. So I'm glad that I made that decision.

Q I think that this is a problem that is common among people. They feel that they have to take it all on and do it themselves or it won't get done. I think that's really interesting. Many of the things that you have talked about today have to do with just making some adjustments mechanically and how they organize time and how they structure their day would certainly relate to values, in your system of values, in what you might feel about what you are doing. But you seem to feel like being a technician, if you could just adjust time, the way you do things, that there are lots of possible solutions to the problems that a person has as a teacher and all the various pressures that are encumbent upon them. Even with all that increased role and all. How do you feel about the role? You feel that the role has been added to and added to. Is that okay? I mean is that right?

Jessica No, it isn't. I think they are getting carried away, but I don't think they are going to stop adding until we all say no. Sure, if you want us to do that, what are you going to tell us that we don't have to do? Because in the history of this school, first there was the reading system, then there was the basic competencies, then there was the math system.

Q It just keeps coming, one thing right after another. And each time it comes either the teachers take it on with little extra incentive or encouragement, but what you seemed to be talking about today is that teachers are to find ways of encouragement and bring it in and make other parts of the community and the school aware of their needs and help provide a way to have it happen. Your inservice program for example.

Jessica Yeah, I think that can help alot if we are given the relased time we ask for.

Q Do you think that will happen?

Jessica It looks like it might. We've just been told we have to go back over our original plan -- the objectives and evaluators format for everything, which is not pleasant, but at least we weren't told, "No, that it is absolutely out of the question - forget it." The next couple of things that they are going to try to add on are probably going to be Individual Education Plans for gifted and talented kids and some kind of compulsory health or drug education. And I really think the time is coming when the teachers are going to say "we just can't do that unless you take something else away."

Q Does cutting the budget, we talked about money and salary. How do people feel when a colleague's position is cut? Does it happen very often that positions are being cut? And they are monkeying around with various staff cuts and talking about that. Does the talk about that or the sense that the public is not willing to say "yes, you can have the money for your budgets," is that kind of talk present in your school at all?

Jessica I would say it is pretty minimal at our school because our town hasn't made a really large cut recently. Most of the reduction of staff has happened through natural attrition. And last year, they thought they were going to cut one of the newest staff members, but she pretty much knew that when she came that she was at the bottom of the seniority list and if it were anyone, it would probably be her. People who have been here a long time haven't really been threatened, so there isn't alot of concern. Now I suppose if there were a large cut this year, but this school doesn't have its school's budget vote until later, there would be some scrambling. We probably wouldn't lose positions, but we would probably lose alot of materials. We are a little spoiled.

Q That's interesting to hear you say that. We have it pretty good here, too, I think sometimes we grouch about it.

End of Tape

Interview with Phillip

March, 1980

Phillip Hi, I would just start by saying what I see, where I see myself, and where I see what happens in this school on a reality level of what is happening. I see people, a group of adults, who are supposedly charged with teaching, but who are really charged, in my mind, with restraining, sort of keeping under cover, holding back, whatever you want to call it (dealing with, coping with, putting up with) early adolescents at a time in their lives when the world out there (points out the window) wants to do it. Or thinks it has the answer of how to do it.

Just me, right now, what I am basically doing is not what I thought I was doing four years ago, which was educating, helping people learn. Largely what I do is go through a series of eight short periods of time every day (sounds very dreary) in which 20 kids come into a room and sit down at a desk. I have something to occupy them - I try as much as possible to make it something that is interesting or that they might learn something from but most of the time because I don't have the resources to do it, I feel that I am just keeping them busy, keeping them occupied, hopefully long enough so that the bell will ring and the next group of kids will come in. This is quite honest about how I am perceiving me at this point in time. Of course, it is March. Back in September, October, November and December and maybe even up to January, I felt a little more like what I was doing was important, was educational, was interesting and I had ideas then. But at this point of the year, and it seems to happen almost every year, I am pretty much out of ideas - out of fresh ways of dealing with kids and things that they bring into the classroom - their problems, their needs, their desires, the things they have to say. My temper is getting quicker and quicker. My patience is less - alot less than it was in September. So that is just what I'm doing. I am really rambling here, but that is how I would define it. You have to ask questions.

Q Do you find you are ignoring things that you would have dealt with earlier?

Phillip Yes, I do. If I really took them seriously (or didn't ignore them), they would really get to me. Why? Because nothing would be done about the real problems and I would be just generating anxiety that would go nowhere - there would be no productive resolution of problems that I would bring to the attention of the administration or the teachers or the child or its parents. Sometimes I feel that is the case. I did feel back in September - earlier on in the year - that I was making an effort to attend to the problems that kids had and to things that were going on. By this time, I have had so much of that! If you really do it, what happens is you end up taking all of your time -- evenings, lunches. I could spend from the time I get up in the morning to when I go to bed at night on this job and still not really feel that I was doing the job. If I were really paying attention to my students and what they need, there's just so much. And so, I blot out some things. It is frustrating to do - but I have

to make priorities as to where I spend my time. What I treat and what I don't in terms of problems. Notice I'm talking alot about problems here and I think it is really what we are asked to do in a sense. Alot of what I should be doing is therapeutic (or how I am describing it seems to be therapeutic).

Q To you?

Phillip To me and the kids. Early adolescence, this age, junior high, is a really troubling, difficult time for kids.

Q Could you talk a little bit about what we were talking about before the interview started? Kids with their egos out on the table? What you said is real relevant here.

Phillip Yeah, I think at this age when kids come into school, they have tremendous ego needs which need to be dealt with - they need to deal with them. They bring then all that stuff in here to school -- they are growing up, they are changing, their bodies are changing, they are becoming interested in sex, drugs, all of those interests and the energy it creates is brought right into the school. And is very much out in the open. They don't hide it - they put it right out on the table because they want to see what the teachers think about it, do about it; they want to see what other kids think about it; they want to see what they think of it. So, they interact. They don't always seem to have full conscious control for what they do. What I think this does for the teacher at this level is to put them into a position of being asked constantly for attention - to attend to something, someone. I think there are very few moments of a junior high teacher's day where they are not being demanded of for attention or whatever. Quite frequently, from three or four people at once. In fact, that is always the case. Maybe it is true for other age levels, but I have been to an elementary school lately and I have seen something very different happening. I don't see at the start of a period teachers having to press kids, literally press kids, down into their seats and try to get them to be quiet, to stop talking and to stop moving their bodies around. And high schools are much more placid, much more controlled. I am not saying I necessarily like that. I am just making an observation.

Q It's different. Could you see this structure being more conducive to kids this age?

Phillip What I would prefer is that we have an environment where the kids could come and channel that energy, the physical energy, into activities (speaking and other kinds of activities) that would make it possible for them to use and deal with all their energy and for us to deal with them rather than to have to suppress them and have to restrain them because it doesn't just seem to be natural. What I think it does to teachers is make it very stressful - it is really hard! It makes life really hard. I think you end up with a day where you feel that you have really been put through the mill. And you don't have an awful lot left - you don't have alot left for yourself

when you leave, you don't have a great deal left for your families or for other people. Therefore, whether you want it or not, the emotional interactions that you have all day long have worn out the wiring, the circuitry in your brain so that you don't have alot of circuitry left to wear out on yourself and on your family. I think this has been one of the really difficult things for me and I think this must apply to other teachers. In fact, I know it does. When I talk with administrators, sought help in this area, you know, I'm really having trouble, I can't sleep at night, things aren't going well at home with my family, short temper with my wife, etc, etc., the answer is pretty much, "You have to learn to leave it at school." I really don't know how that is possible to do. I have tried to think about it. I know there are devices for relaxation and there are methods of relaxing yourself -- people do exercise, people do yoga, people meditate, etc. I haven't. The only one of those I've tried is jogging and to some degree that does sort of let all the pent up stress kind of wind its way out - it does relax you, but it doesn't seem to make the stress go away.

So that's pertaining to burnout. I don't know, one way of defining burnout is to use another word - stress - just call it sheer stress - it builds up. Speaking about me, personally again, I have a rash on my hand that gets aggravated. It seems to go away during vacations and whenever I am out of school and it comes back when I am in school again. It was gone all last summer and it goes away during vacations, but it comes back when I am here. It has been back recently. I've done alot of reading about the topic because I've been interested in it, and I know it is possible to manifest physical symptoms out of stress and one of them is rashes and things like that. That has kind of concerned me lately because when it really gets bad and aggravated, I can't get rid of it - it just won't go away, it hurts, it's sore, it's just there, there's pus, ugh. I am just ready to leave this school... this year.

Q Can I interrupt? You are now making a distinction between burnout for this year and total washed up burnout?

Phillip Yeah.

Q Are there different kinds of burnout from your point of view?

Phillip Yeah, like I was saying, one kind of burnout is just physical exhaustion - a physical and mental kind of combined exhaustion. By the way, to describe my teaching responsibilities might shed some light on burnout. I am really interested in teaching and working with kids, I thoroughly am, truly am. I have some days of the week where I have six or seven class periods a day with students - this leaves me with forty minutes of time per day supposedly for preparation, assignments, evaluation, research and anything I have to do that is sort of auxillary to teaching. That goes with it -- all of the important functions both preparing for and following up on with what you are doing with those individuals and I don't have that heavy a

teaching load compared to many. I have about ninety students total. What frustrates me is that I really can't give those kids the kind of attention I should, like all the rhetoric about teaching that I heard and that you hear every day espoused by school boards and in articles about teaching and by teacher educators and everything. There is just no way that I can individualize and meet the needs of every one of my students to the degree that it is talked up that a teacher should. Most of the time, there is just not that much time during the day to plan, evaluate -- it is really frustrating. I don't have enough time to read all the papers that kids generate - I throw them away sometimes or end up having piles of paper that never get looked at. Because I just don't have time.

Q Who supports you in what you do? Where does your support come from? (It is an assumption that you have support.)

Phillip My support? I think parents are supportive. They talk support when you call them. They seem to support you in what you are doing and they will try to talk with their children and do what is right at home - try to back up what happens at school. I think most parents are concerned about their kids' education - oddly enough, from what I was saying earlier, you wouldn't think that. Administrators will talk about concern quite alot. Whenever I have gone to my principal, I feel that he really heard what I said about my problems about my need for help with various things in the classroom with individual students and in the things that I am expected to do. He seems to really hear what I say. Yet time and again, maybe it is just a result of his job, he has so many things to be concerned about that I don't feel the support ever comes forth beyond that meeting. I have had three or four nice chats with our principal here and he has been very supportive and commending my work and what I have tried to do, etc, and yet, when I really think about it, only once during the year has he had time to get into my classroom and that was just for evaluation. For really severe behavior problems, the three or four kids that take up most of your time from the standpoint of causing trouble, nothing has been done, the way I look at it. He's tried, I think. I don't think the blame is all necessarily with him. I don't feel that the administration is very effective in supporting the teachers in dealing with the more severe behavioral problems that come up. I think teachers are pretty much left to cope with them on their own.

Q Teachers are?

Phillip Yeah, I think so. A good sort of game is talked up and there is alot of paper that is passed around from people to people about problems - we have a form that we fill out about discipline problems that the principal and the guidance counselor see, but they are pretty powerless, to be honest, to do too much about the severe behavioral problems. The best they can do is keep them in their office and talk with them and call the parents. I don't know where that gets you except I

do know that support for my colleagues and for me is non existent.

And I can speak a little about myself and others which I was going to do a few minutes ago, about other teachers that are roughly my age that I know have come into the profession. They tend to have come, and I think this is very interesting, to me at least, the reasons that I came into teaching center at the time I went through college; the decisions that I made of what I was going to do with my life, mostly stem from college. The Vietnam War was being fought and Kent State, Cambodia, all the demonstrations really soured alot of people, contemporary to me, on the traditional way of doing something with your life - like going out and being a businessman, a lawyer, or whatever and making money and paying your taxes and sort of ignoring the social side of life. So, I decided what I wanted to do was to help other people. I was interested in working with people and making the world a better place. I think to a majority of people contemporary to me, the world seemed like (at least in the U.S. society) it was a mess and the only way to do something about it was to go out and change it. And one way to change it would be to become a teacher and be in a position where you would have some power over people's lives, so that you would have some power to teach and show people ways of relating to each other, relating to the world in ways that were positive and constructive - that would stop impossible things like the Vietnam War and all the killing and the violence and what was happening wouldn't happen again. That is sort of a vague general statement, but it gives some idea of where I was and most people who are older or a little bit younger than I and why they went into teaching, I feel. And it was sort of a very idealistic - a naive feeling, but a good feeling, the right feeling to have, but a little bit naive that you could just go into teaching (or anything else) and go out and change the world because you had the right ideas and you would try hard - you would be open-minded and approach it with real intent to make good and to do good. It just doesn't necessarily fit or evolve as a result of those intentions and those feelings. That's why I went into teaching as a way to do that and also to make some money and earn a living. Somehow I felt that is was more honest for me (which seems silly now that you look at it) than business people like my parents or anything else. We've come a long way.

Obviously, I don't feel those expectations have been fulfilled. You can hear that from the way I have been talking about my job, about what I am doing here over the last few minutes. So, where does that leave me - it sort of leaves me at a vacant place. And it leaves other teachers I know there,too. I have a couple of close friends who went into teaching for those kinds of reasons I talked about and have slowly found out the profession (or the world) wasn't ready to accept, embrace, and take them on in that capacity. You just couldn't go into a school and make a difference and make all the changes. In fact, what happens is really like putting your toe into quicksand, you get sucked down in very quickly

and getting caught in the middle. You know what you want to do is get yourself out of the quicksand and take a look and see what it is all about. (I think that is a good metaphor for it). But once you are in the quicksand it becomes, at least for me (and there again I am not putting myself down, I'm just making a statement), very confusing. I went into teaching with sort of a pristine kind of view, with sort of a sense of unity and purpose of why I was going in and what I was going to do when I got there. It seems scattered and fragmented now. I am just surviving like everyone else. Making it from day to day, coping, doing what's expected of me. In some cases, I do see creative things being done. Goodness knows, I've tried to do some creative things, but again it's like putting your toe into quicksand. I'll give you an example and I would bet that this happens to other teachers. I tried to do a drama workshop this year with some kids. First of all, there wasn't any drama position in the school. The reason I tried to do a drama workshop was that there are very few extra curricular activities offered byond winter basketball and cheerleading. In fact, there is virtually nothing done outside of school for kids. There are dances, but there are no clubs, no activities. I was going to talk about the drama club. The drama club was an interesting case, I think, because I wanted to make a change in the school. I wanted to provide an activity for the students that heretofore hadn't existed. I wanted to do this because I thought kids were asking for the chance to do this. So here I am, a teacher, wanting to meet that need somehow. First of all, I went looking for a place to do this. It was very difficult to find one in the school because - Oh, I'm sorry, I've got to backtrack a little bit. What we did is that we went and got some money from the Vermont Council on the Arts. We got some money to do a drama workshop and to bring in a guy who was an artist, a dramatist to do some of it. We had 15 kids show up for the first meeting. It was meeting at a time of day (at 2:00 p.m.) when there wasn't any room to meet in aside from the gym, a cold room, no heat in it and no windows, it was just a dreary, bleak place to meet in. The kids would come down at two and meet until four o'clock and do some things - drama exercises, organizational dramas, limbering up and all kinds of things and it was fun for a little while. Slowly, the kids kind of began dropping out and eventually it got to the point where there were only two of them left and we still had eight weeks of the drama workshop left. We worked with them, then I tried to figure out why it was the kids hadn't shown up. Again, there were all kinds of various reasons. One of them was that alot of them didn't like staying around school after school was over, they'd become so used to getting out of school that they wanted to leave at three o'clock when the bell rang. That is sort of silly, but that was a powerful influence on the whole thing. The other thing was that a couple of kids got jobs (which is understandable and is all right), but they had made the commitment to the drama workshop and although I sort of insisted that they keep their commitment, I felt that these jobs after school were what they wanted to do. I let them off the hook. The point of this whole thing was that having started out with the right idea to give a drama workshop

for the kids became really sort of a drag -- there were only two or three kids showing up each time, there wasn't the interest I had thought there would be. Then we wanted to do a play with just those two kids and we had to do alot of haggling with the administration as to when we could do it. We wanted to do it for an assembly, but we couldn't - we couldn't do it for classes and it just sort of ended.

Q Why not an assembly?

Phillip He said it was too embarrassing for the kids that were doing it because it wasn't good enough.

Q Did the administrators make this decision?

Phillip Yeah, yeah. So my conclusion is that something like that should really be offered as part of the day and not something that kids have to hang around for after school when they have to be doing other things. So-called extra curricular activities should, in my mind, be part of a normal day. What I thought with good intention would be good, I put alot of time into, getting the money and getting the thing started, I thought there would be alot of kids interested in it because alot of people were asking me "Can we have a drama workshop?" It ended up being where very few kids showed up, no other teachers were interested in it all; I put something in the notices, no other teachers came. Even the guidance counselor who helped to get this thing started (who really pushed me over the brink into doing it in fact) never came to any of our sessions at all. I felt sort of left alone holding the bag in this experience that went nowhere. It wasn't much fun. We did salvage a nice mime show for these two kids and put it on for two classes during the day.

You can see this experience is just a case in point of where I am. What came of it? I suppose I could look at it and say something good for there were two kids that put on a mime show, but really what I ended up feeling was that I put an awful lot of energy into something that didn't go too far. You can only do that so many times without saying that this is ridiculous. This is like trying to grow a flower in a bed of sand, a plant in a pile of quartz. So I'm not going to do that again.

And this is the way I am feeling about alot of these things. It is the same with the _____ Project that we had. I took on the directorship and had about a half a year to get it cleaned up and straightened around and start it on the right track and then it was cut off and that was it. But there wasn't the support for that, either from the teachers to begin with - it should never have been done on the assumption that it was going to get support from the schools. There was one administrator who had a vision that brought it into the school in the first place and sold it to a few teachers and then he left - that was it. That just illustrates again - the teachers didn't take that on - they didn't embrace it all. You can't come into a place - that's a central element to my

feeling about teaching at this point. I came in really expecting (and I know a number of people who were in similar ways of thinking about teaching five or six year ago when they started) came in feeling that this was a place that you could really make some kind of contribution to making people's lives and community a better place because you were doing a good job of working with people in the schools. It doesn't really seem to be the case, at least for me.

As far as support from fellow staff, getting back to support, I feel like since I've been here there has been nothing but attempts to undermine me, most of the teachers that I came in here to work with have been here quite awhile. They were very suspicious of me, thought I was coming in here with all kinds of weird ideas. I really wasn't and I don't feel that they were that "far out" or wild.

Q You just came as another teacher?

Phillip Yeah, I just came as another teacher.

Q You were not brought in to change the world?

Phillip No, but I didn't know that I was being brought in by _____ and he really was brought in to change the world. I have been associated with him and always will be. If they can get rid of me, some of them would. So that's always been a source of my problem. I don't have any of the textbooks or any of the materials - I have one fifth of what the other language arts teachers have - just paper and book resources to work with and I am (last year when they were talking about doing team teaching for special education kids, kids that were deficit in reading) excluded from the discussions without being asked. Arbitrarily - I wasn't even asked if I was interested in working with that type of kid.

Q By other teachers?

Phillip Yeah, by the other teachers. Now the principal has been nice. He asked me last year if I could do some work with the gifted and talented. He was interested in seeing me do that and I said I would and I went to a conference and got involved and interested. No other teachers around here are interested in doing anything. I've made announcements at faculty meetings and did all kinds of things to try to get teachers to sponsor kids. You can only do so much. The paper work you have to go through is just ridiculous to get a $75 grant to get some kids to be able to do some independent reading and go on a field trip. It is utterly absurd. So I'm more and more in the fire here - roasting myself. But that's how I do feel. You asked awhile ago about support and I don't feel that I get much support from staff in terms of real interest in teaching and in what I am doing in the classroom. There is really no time for it anyway. Most people are in their rooms all day long.

Q You could say, "Screw it, I'm just going to close my door and do my own thing and earn my money."

Phillip That's pretty much what I am doing right now. But I do care and that's what bothers me. I feel like a big chunk of granite - a granite statue - that came in and has been slowly whittled away and there is just a little piece of stone - a sort of core, surviving element. And I am coming in every day and I do care about the kids and I do care about the fact that I am here with them and that time is going by and it should matter and try to make it, as I said earlier, to try to entertain and try to make it so that people learn and think as a result of what I do as a teacher. I definitely try to be nice, try to help out, try to be a positive, friendly person, but it is very difficult to do sometimes when you feel like I've been describing my feelings.

Q Do kids still respond to that?

Phillip Yeah, they kind of do.

Q It must be weird in comparison to the other teachers? Are you strange to the kids , in that way, too?

Phillip Yeah, sure I am - they think I'm very weird. They think a few other teachers are very weird, too - I'm not alone on that. What prevents me from shutting my door and doing my own thing (and I think you can hear this said from alot of people in my position is similar to me that I know of) is pressure from the community. The students in _____ are going to go on to the local high school and the majority of them are going to get into college tracks. The parents are very concerned that they have the traditional basic skills all set by the time they get there. I am not so concerned with that alone as I am with what kind of people they are, with what they think and do with those basic skills - how they put them to use communicating and what the content is of what they are doing.

If you do anything a little bit too outlandish, out of the ordinary, kids won't be comfortable with it. First of all, they like predictable, manageable tasks that don't call for any novelty or any insecurity, any unusual anxiety. They don't like too much of that and if you raise the anxiety level too much, then aren't you doing basic skills? If you talk about cancer or any number of relevant things, they will interpret that as non-basic and word will get to their parents. People will start interpreting that as (at least this has happened to me) not basic, non-essential, frivolous, weird, not teaching English, "not doing his job" kind of things. Phone calls will come from parents, kids will get transferred out of your class and you start having things happen which will be alot of trouble and you will have to spend alot of time on the defensive. I have done that for three years and I got tired of doing it, so, I stopped after awhile. Eliminate uncontroversial material and eliminate things that are not basic; main line -- English teaching for the school and you will be in good shape. You won't get into trouble. That's what prevents me from being creative.

And I am pretty much just closing the door and doing what's expected of me. Even that is very difficult because what is expected of me is not what I would like to be doing - the basic competencies, hours and hours of teaching things which I don't believe any longer in teaching. That's also bad, too. I think I have several friends who are teachers who are alot like myself, they are doing things that they don't believe in doing because the community or kids expect it of them or because it has always been done and you're expected to do and believe it. It is very hard to fight that. You can provide articles, studies to back up what you are saying, but if people want to believe something, they are going to believe it.

An awful lot of this has been sort of on me - I feel bad about that. I haven't talked more generally about teacher burnout and I could. What I've talked about is what I see is really burnout for me and central to alot of this is what I wanted to do as a teacher. I feel that the need was really there for people to make a commitment to public education a part of keeping America from going down the drain. And I know that is a very large generalization, but that is a very grandiose sense of what your mission is. But, why not think of yourself as important and that your mission ought to be something valuable? So that's what I see as having been very central to my motivation for becoming a teacher. The fact that I have not been able to do that has alot to do with why I feel completely defeated at this point in time. Maybe it's just this fact? Or maybe it's just this school? Maybe it's just this age? Maybe it's just that I haven't had enough background, exposure, experience? All these things that we haven't mentioned, my skill as a teacher certainly can use improving. I can sense that, but yet you mentioned support. The support systems for things like improvement of skills have been non-existent. You can only do just so much. I've tried video-taping myself and watching those - you know, I've looked at my evaluations seriously when they come in (which isn't very often) from my department chairman and my principal and tried to make of those what I could and tried to make some improvements, tried to look at other schools, other teachers. I don't think you develop the art of teaching by just being isolated in a vacuum. You gotta get out, you gotta see other things -- you have to have exposure to alot of new ideas and be able to try them out and you have to have an environment where experimentation is acceptable for trying things. It really isn't here. It is predictable to try the tried and true things in education to a large degree. At least here.

What were you going to ask me?

Q The friends that you talked about, what's your hunch about other people who may be burning out? Is it the same kind of thing that they came in with - a belief in America to keep it from going down the tubes? And are they tired of fighting?

Phillip Yep, they are tired of fighting and I think they are tired. I also think what I talked about earlier, those kids that I told

you about, is what burns you out. It is very hard to be exposed every day to kids who come in here with violence on their minds. It's just a reflection of what is happening generally out in their home and out in the community. Not all of that is very pretty or very attractive. Some of it is - there are some good families, good parents, and constructive lives being lived out. But I know there is an awful lot of child abuse, an awful lot of psychological punishment and cruelty, bad nutrition. All kinds of things you see as a teacher can't help but take its toll. You see it every day. It's like watching all the violence of the Vietnam War on television.

Q You're an actor in this play, is that what it is?

Phillip You are part of it. To address your question, yes, I do think so. But I also see people who are older than I am who didn't come into teaching when I came in - whose ideas are different - people who are ten to fifteen years into the profession who I know certainly would be more than willing to step out if they had a better opportunity of some kind. Why that is, I don't know. I guess I feel much more comfortable talking about people contemporary to me and their motives for being in teaching and what that has to do with burning out. But I know the stress is there for everybody.

Q Are some of those people in this building?

Phillip Oh, yeah, no doubt about it. I think teachers' images of themselves are generally very low. I don't think teaching is something that people feel very good about doing. When I was growing up, my parents always looked on people as sort of those who can, do something worthwhile and those who can't, teach. I think people really believe that. I think to some extent it's true, that people went into teaching who couldn't do anything else. I picked it up from my parents in a way. I had this latent or subconscious attitude that teachers are like that, it isn't where the go-getters in the world go. I have a suspicion that once that was the case. I'd like to think not and I'd like to think that I hadn't said that, but yes, I do. There are teachers who have been here alot longer than I have who are ready to leave. Alot of it is for the same reasons. They are under stress - they are being asked to do a job that is impossible - they are asked to make a good experience of early adolescence in what I see as a very troubled time societally and channel that experience in a positive direction. I think they are feeling the same failure and frustration.

Oddly enough, I cited reasons that I feel specific to my historical experience when I was growing up. Maybe my reasons for feeling what I do related to burnout are not that different for people up and down the line. But I certainly would say that I see (at least in this school where I work) teachers that I know (and teacher from other schools that I have talked with) are not having very good feelings about being in teaching at this particular time. Almost any teacher you talk with, especially in March, might be very ready for summer vacation.

Section Two

Problem Statement:

The research reported in this document focused on a phenomenon that is receiving a good deal of "air-time" these days - teacher burnout. Specifically, this report probed the phenomenon of teacher burnout in junior high school settings by examining the perceptions of three junior high school teachers as to the following issues:

1. How is burnout defined?
2. What are the causes of burnout?
3. Is burnout perceived in varying degrees of severity; that is, is there a typology of burnout?
4. What are the symptoms of burnout and are there some that are unique to an individual and others that relate to many individuals?
5. What efforts have been undertaken by individuals to ease the effects of burnout?

As a result of this investigation, several hypotheses will be suggested for future systematic investigation.

Rationale:

A "given" in this study was that "burnout," a term used to describe a state of physical, mental and emotional exhaustion in teachers, does indeed exist. An open ear in almost any school setting will hear the word bandied about during any given day and an open eye to the several popular teacher journals will reveal articles to be read concerning burnout and workshops to be taken to alleviate the effects of burnout.

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The "itch" that started the authors on this collaborative effort was the observation that there seemed to be precious little systematic inquiry undertaken with teachers to define the term, its causes and its symptoms. Burnout "experts" have grown-up suddenly in the past several years who run a variety of workshop offerings for the alleviation of burnout stress. Yet these experts, on the whole, are not teachers. These workshops are being run with many assumptions about the phenomenon and we wondered if these assumptions were accurate with respect to members of the teaching profession. Hence, our desire was to establish a small piece of qualitative, phenomenological inquiry into the world of burnout and teachers. This research, though limited in scope, attempts to gain a perspective of the phenomenon of burnout as perceived and judged by the people who constitute the world of junior high school teachers. It holds to the dictum stated by Thomas: "If men define situations as real, they are real in their consequences." (Thomas, E, 1928) This research will not judge the merit of any given workshops. Rather, it will attempt to provide a data base upon which professionals involved with burnout, directly or indirectly, may orient their efforts with validity.

The broad context for this study is the written literature on burnout. Surprisingly, little systematic inquiry seems to exist. A computer search of the ERIC files revealed only twenty-six entires that spoke to "burnout" and only six of these specifically related to the world of teachers. None of these six reported a study undertaken to inquire systematically into the phenomenon. They were either first person accounts of being "burned out" (Bardo, 1979), observational accounts of the phenomenon

(Hendrickson, 1979), or suggestions about what to do to combat the phenomenon (Hendrickson, 1979; Reed, 1979; Freeman, 1979). Spaniol (Dubrin et. al., 1979) has established a typology of the burnout phenomenon, but extensive efforts to find detailed explication of his typology were unsuccessful. As briefly reported in a special report in Instructor magazine, three levels of "burn" defined by Spaniol were explained.

Level 1. First-degree burn (mild): short-lived bouts of irritability, fatigue, worry, and frustration.

Level 2. Second-degree burn (moderate): same as mild, but lasts for two weeks or more.

Level 3. Third-degree burn (severe): physical ailments such as ulcers, chronic back pain, migraine headaches, and so on.

A similar search of Psychological Abstracts was undertaken. The only entry found related to the burnout of teachers in a day-care setting (Maslach and Pines, 1977). When the Abstracts were searched for "teaching stress" on the junior high school level, three entries were found. These entries spoke to the environment of a junior high setting (Davis, 1976), teachers' participation in decision making (Devlin, 1978), and the effectiveness of vocational counseling (Khizhukhovskaya, 1973). None addressed the burnout phenomenon directly.

A second "given" in this study was that the voluminous literature on stress was not reviewed except for studies that looked at teaching stress on the junior high school level. The researchers wished to keep this study narrowly focused on burnout and desired to inform that phenomenon from an inquiry emanating out of the teaching world. It is our belief, however, that future efforts regarding inquiry into the burnout phenomenon merit a review of the stress literature..

Methodology:

The methodology involved in this research was of two parts: an open ended interview and peer jury assessment. In the open ended interview, the interviewer explained the general purpose of the study and the interviewee was allowed to respond freely to the topic. The interviewer stated that the researchers were interested in finding out what teachers thought about the phenomenon of teacher burnout. What was it? Had it affected them in their professional lives? How were they aware of it? What were factors in their setting and in themselves that they thought led to it? In all cases, the interviewer was a member of the collaborative team and in one case, an interviewee was the teacher of the collaborative team. The interviews were roughly forty-five minutes in length and were tape recorded at the place of work of the interviewee in a private setting within the person's school.

Following the interview, the recording was transcribed verbatim. These transcriptions constituted the raw data of the study. Each transcription has been included in the first section of this report.

The transcribed interviews were then submitted to a peer review panel to reduce the data to meaningful terms. A jury of peers was selected because the researchers were interested in having the data reviewed by persons as close as possible to the teaching world of the interviewees. This decision was made in keeping with the spirit of phenomenological inquiry. Bronfenbrenner speaks to this point. He states "From an ecological perspective,...the impact of the setting cannot be understood without some information on how the setting, and its various elements, were perceived by the participants." (Bronfenbrenner, 1976)

Like Bronfenbrenner, the current research effort attempted to capture as fully as possible accounts from real teachers in real settings feeling real feelings and thinking real thoughts. Invoking a jury of peers to review the data was in keeping with the spirit of this inquiry. People "from the inside" should be responsible for reviewing the data. Their worlds are as close to the worlds of the interviewees as anyone can be. They would be as sensitive as anyone to the nuance of the spoken word and for that reason, the data would remain as rich as possible.

The readers were made aware of this fact in their instructions (Appendix A). They were asked to read the interviews and to note statements made by the interviewees that addressed the following categories.

Categories for Analysis of Burnout Interviews (See Appendix B for recording sheet)

Category 1. Definition of Burnout

Some interviews give a definition of burnout as the teacher sees the phenomenon. If you find a definition in the interview, note it here with appropriate page/line.

Category 2. Causes of Burnout

The interviews may reveal a variety of perceived causes of burnout. Note such causes in this column along with a brief description of the cause from the interview.

In addition to the causes, we are interested to find out if you, the reader, believe the cause is unique to the particular teacher or if it is a cause that would affect most teachers on the junior high school level. After noting the particular cause, check the appropriate column to register whether you believe the cause to be unique to the particular teacher (U) or present for most junior high school teachers (M).

Category 3. Type of Burnout

The interviews may reveal "burnout" as a typology. That is, the given interviewee may see burnout as occurring in degrees or levels of intensity. If the interview reveals a kind of hierarchy in the mind of the interviewees, note this in this column. Add your comments to describe the typology.

Category 4. Symptoms of Burnout

The interviews talk about personal signs - actions - behaviors that indicate a person is "burning out." Note such signs in this column and add a brief condensation of the symptoms from the interview.

Category 5. Efforts to Ease the Effects of Burnout

In some cases, the interviews may speak of actions taken to ease the effects of burnout felt by the individual. Note these actions in this column along with appropriate page/line. Add a brief description of these actions.

The categories were developed by the researchers in light of the information they wished to extract from the interviews. A recording sheet was developed to standardize their recording process (Appendix B).

Sample:

Three teachers were interviewed. Each was in their late twenties or early thirties and each had at least four years teaching experience. Figure 1 relates specific information regarding the sample.

Figure 1 Sample Characteristics

	Teacher		
	Jessica	Conrad	Phillip
Age	33	28	27
Number of Years of Experience	Nine	Seven	Four
Type of Experience	2 yrs. high school French 3 yrs. "off" 7 yrs. junior high English	4 yrs. high school 2 yrs. elementary school 1 yr. SED	4 yrs. junior high language arts
College Preparation	BA Romance Languages MEd	BS Education MEd	BA English
Current Responsibilities	junior high English	8th grade math team taught	junior high English
Where Interview Took Place	at another school	in the library at his school	in his classroom after school
Number of Students in Junior High School	160	450	280
Classroom Setting	open space	open space with curtain dividers	"normal" four-walled classroom, older school

Data Analysis:

Each of the three members of the jury was given an entire set of interviews to assess. Following their assessment, they were called together to collate their assessments. Each reader read the assessments in turn and the assessments were recorded on a master sheet. The assessments consisted of noting page and line of a quote in an interview that fell within one of the categories of teacher burnout. Quotes were chosen only if all members of the jury agreed to select the quote and agreed on the appropriate category for the content of the quote. The researchers then placed the quotes within subcategories under each major category of teacher burnout for ease of interpretation. The subcategories chosen follow.

1. Definition of Burnout

   The teachers defined burnout by describing what might best be termed "overall effects on the person" and "specific behavioral effects" on the person. Definitions apart from how the phenomenon effected individuals were not identified by the teachers; yet they did use terms to define the phenomenon that were in some cases separate and distinct from Category 4, symptoms of burnout. Therefore, two subcategories were selected to define burnout.

   A. Overall Effects on the Person

   B. Specific Effects on the Person

2. Causes of Burnout

   A. Causes Related To Staff

      These causes related to the interpersonal and attitudinal relationships among staff members within a given school setting. They related specifically to the relationships among teachers.

   B. Causes Related to Administrators

      These causes related to the way in which school administrators were perceived to contribute to the burnout of teachers. "Administrators" is broadly interpreted to mean those administrators within a given school building and administrators

who determine policy at the central office of the district.

C. Causes Related to the Community

These causes concern the impact of the opinions expressed by parents or the voting community at large that the teachers perceive contributing to teacher burnout.

D. Causes Related to the Nature of the Job

The causes in this subcategory are those that accrue from the teaching function in the junior high schools where the teachers worked. They are conditions one automatically encounters if one teaches in a junior high setting as perceived by the teachers interviewed and selected by the jury.

3. Type of Burnout

There were no subcategories in this section.

4. Symptoms of Burnout

All the symptoms were judged to relate to the person. There were no other subcategories.

5. Efforts to Stem the Effects of Burnout

A. Staff Efforts

These efforts relate to what could be done by cooperative efforts among teaching staffs to alleviate symptoms of burnout.

B. Professional Efforts

The teachers identified things that could be done to stem burnout at a level of action in the profession beyond specific school-related concerns. These actions are noted here.

C. Efforts While Teaching

This subcategory notes those things mentioned by teachers that are useful for teachers to do in the conduct of their teaching to stem the effects of burnout.

D. Personal Efforts

The teachers spoke to things they could do in their personal lives that helped alleviate stress and provided a more focused perspective for themselves as human beings first and as teachers second. These things are noted in this subcategory.

The results of this study are reported according to these categories. Specific factors mentioned in the interviews and agreed to by all members of the jury are grouped under each of the categories analyzed. Following each factor a notation follows, eg. (Jessica 14/13). This indicates the specific reference in an interview that relates to the factor identified by the jury. The first number signifies the page number in this report and the second number indicates the line of the article in which the reference may be found and the name indicates the teacher interviewed.

Results:

I. Definition of Burnout

A. Overall effects on the person

1. a general reduction in the teacher's ego and positive feelings about him or herself. (Conrad 4/33, Phillip 33/27)

2. low morale among members of the teaching staff (Jessica 15/9)

3. a general loss in the teachers sense of purpose for being in the profession of teaching (Phillip 33/5, Jessica 15/37)

4. physical and mental exhaustion (Phillip 26/46, Jessica 15/10)

5. the necessity of having to deal with the sheer stress of working in a junior high school setting (Phillip 26/24)

B. *Specific effects on the person

1. a general feeling of tiredness in the teacher (Jessica 15/10, Conrad 7/4, Phillip 26/46)

2. a cynical attitude about most aspects of the teacher's work (Jessica 14/13, Phillip 41/10, Conrad 13/1)

II. Types of Burnout (organized in a hierarchy from low burnout to high burnout)

A. Non-Burnout:

The teacher operates at 100% efficiency, excited about what he/she is doing, and likes his/her work (Conrad 11/4)

B. Beginning Burnout:

The teacher at a reduced level of efficiency 75%,.., is on top of things but begins to be tired, gets up later in the morning, sees his/herself as keeping kids "occupied" more than sees self as "teaching," and develops negative feelings about work (Conrad 11/2, Phillip 24/6, Jessica 19/11)

C. Advanced Burnout:

The teacher experiences shortened temper, anxiety attacks; avoids certain situations in schools; and makes errors. There is at this level the onset of physical manifestations such as lack of sleep and rashes, perhaps. (Conrad 11/4, 11/55, Phillip 27/25)

D. Burned-out:

The teacher quits his/her job and looks for another kind of work elsewhere. (Jessica 20/5)

III. Symptoms of Burnout

1. tiredness and fatigue interpreted to mean an overall physical exhaustedness which is more chronic than acute in nature (Jessica 15/10, Conrad 9/1, Phillip 27/12)

*These were also seen as symptoms of burnout. However, the jury felt their effect to be definitional as well. That is, once they were symptoms, they were behaviors that helped to define the phenomenon.

2. a cynical, complaining attitude about many aspects of school life including colleagues, kids, and school administration (Jessica 20/13, Conrad 12/5, 12/56, Phillip 34/55)

3. making simple errors in work normally accomplished with no error (Conrad 11/48)

4. feeling claustrophobic, closed in about being in the school and classroom setting (Conrad 11/51)

5. having a short temper and "blowing your cool" in situations that normally do not elicit such a response (Conrad 11/55, Phillip 24/32)

6. leaving home later in the morning and not wanting to get out of bed and go to school over an extended period of time (Conrad 12/1)

7. avoiding situations you know you should do something about but don't want to because you'll only have to deal with them again and again (Phillip 24/57)

8. physical ailments that won't go away such as insomnia or persistent rashes (Phillip 27/25, 26/10, Conrad 12/1)

9. feeling depressed and distraught, "down in the dumps," for an extended period of time (Phillip 24/9, Jessica 15/1)

10. knowing that your efforts are directed solely at keeping the kids occupied and not teaching as you know it ought to be done (Phillip 24/6)

IV. Causes of Burnout

In the jury assessment, it was not possible to ascertain whether or not a specific cause was unique to the individual being interviewed or was felt by other junior high teachers as well. This piece of data has therefore been omitted in this section of the study.

A. Causes related to staff

1. negative teachers' room talk that tends to encourage cynicism and downright ugly feelings about kids, teaching, and the profession (Conrad 13/1, Phillip 31/52, Jessica 19/43, 20/13)

2. the isolation of being alone in a building of strangers where few people seem to care about what you do (Jessica 19/42, Conrad 4/8, Phillip 31/10)

3. having your creative efforts go unsupported or even actively discouraged (Phillip 31/10)

B. Causes related to administrators

1. working in a school setting where the rules are loose and not enforced effectively (Conrad 3/51, Phillip 27/43)

2. chronic behavior problems are not effectively followed up in terms of support for teachers (Phillip 27/50+)

3. the support of professional feedback is lacking (Conrad 4/4, Phillip 27/43)

4. multiple demands upon teachers seem to increase with no responsibilities ever taken away (Jessica 18/9, 21/41)

5. feeling of teachers' powerlessness to effect input or change into administrative demands (Jessica 15/51)

C. Causes related to the community

1. the conservative mood of the community tends to inhibit curriculum efforts that could be exciting for teachers to pursue (Phillip 32/26, 32/49)

2. parents believing they know better what ought to be done in schools more than the teachers (Conrad 4/57, Phillip 32/33)

3. the small group of totally irresponsible parents whose children are chronically irresponsible or worse (Conrad 10/48, Phillip 34/2)

D. Causes related to the nature of the job

1. the developmental period of adolescence means kids will be challenging, critical, and argumentative, all of which seemed to be expressed with an overall negative twist... They seem to need to build themselves up at the expense of others, ie. teachers; they also seem to resist any teaching efforts they perceive as new or non-traditional (Conrad 4/38, 8/53, 10/27, Phillip 25/9, 25/16, 25/38, 32/39)

2. there is little time for reflective thinking about your job because of the fast pace of the job (Conrad 6/13)

3. no time for important things and too much time spent on unimportant things (Conrad 6/7, 5/25, Phillip 27/5)

4. inaccurate personal expectations concerning what a teacher can accomplish with kids at the junior high level (Conrad 10/1, Phillip 31/4, 28/11)

5. the gulf between the reality of teaching and one's ideals for coming into the profession (Phillip 31/5, 28/46, 33/6)

6. not taking responsibility for doing the things you need to do for yourself to prevent your own burnout (Jessica 21/9, Conrad 12/55, 17/45)

7. in some cases, the sheer boredom of doing the same thing day in and day out, week after week (Jessica 15/30, Conrad 3/35)

8. using burnout as an effective excuse for your own lack of initiative (Conrad 12/51)

9. lack of social status of the profession of teaching (Conrad 6/46, Phillip 34/30+)

10. being so intense in your desire to do all things for all kids and meet all their needs (Phillip 24/49)

11. the chronic and severe behavior problems seem to remain in school and exercise their problemmatic behavior constantly (Phillip 34/2, 34/9)

12. teacher preparation is not specialized to prepare one to work with kids of this developmental level (Phillip 33/31)

13. the giving is great and the return is minimal in terms of the effort a teacher expends during each day (Conrad 4/25, 5/31, 6/32)

V. Efforts to Stem the Effects of Burnout

A. Staff efforts

1. establish support groups of teachers who can talk and share their experiences in out-of-school settings (Jessica 19/42, 17/23)

2. work systematically to create positive attitudes within a school about the work people do there (Jessica 17/21, Conrad 13/15, 13/22)

B. Professional efforts

1. hold workshops at school to systematically attack the causes of burnout and assure these workshops have follow-up (Jessica 15/26, 17/31)

2. work within associations and unions to better work conditions (Jessica 21/11)

C. Efforts while teaching

1. learn to delegate responsibilities to others to lessen your work load (Jessica 19/26)

2. use new approaches as a matter of regular practice, particularly approaches that are exciting to the teacher (Conrad 8/15, Phillip 33/41+)

3, 4. continue to learn new things by making an effort to be in touch with other teachers in other settings (Conrad 8/24, 8/35, Phillip 33/41)

5. be organized so that you are not constantly at the job whether in school or at home (Conrad 7/7, Jessica 16/26)

D. Personal efforts

1. clarify one's personal values regularly with respect to what your professional and personal goals are (Jessica 16/28)

2. seek out positive influences in your work influences (Jessica 17/21, Conrad 13/15, 13/22)

3. develop a perspective on your junior high students that helps you understand they aren't always this way, forever (Conrad 9/40, 10/8)

4. take personal time for yourself regularly each week (Conrad 9/16, Jessica 16/28)

5. know what works for you when you have to get away from the negative influence of the job (Conrad 9/49)

6. work harder yourself to ease your own problems - others can't solve them for you and chances are changing jobs will only mean you'll take your problems with you (Conrad 9/44+)

7. investigate a variety of self-help techniques (jogging, dance, yoga, meditation, sports) that can help you ease the effects of stress (Phillip 25/16)

Recommendations:

The results of this research cannot be assembled into a brief set of recommendations easily. Exploratory research of this nature does not lead to neat and tidy conclusions. However, from the analysis of the teachers' interviews, several observations and recommendations seem to follow nicely.

Observations

1. Burnout is clearly a phenomenon that does exist at the levels of schooling carried out in junior high schools. The three teachers interviewed, seen through the lenses and filters of their own lives, knew the phenomenon and related personally to it.

2. Burnout affects different people in different ways. Some symptoms were present across all three teachers; others were unique to individuals.

3. Burnout seems to be fueled by systemic variables within school buildings. That is, there were causes that went beyond individual teachers that affected individual teachers.

4. Once felt, burnout seems to fuel itself unless decided action representing changes in an individual's behavior are undertaken. This is more difficult as burnout reaches its advanced stages.

5. The junior high school setting seems to be a particularly fertile ground for producing burnout among teachers due to the developmental characteristics of their adolescent population. Children establishing their identities are at odds with life as represented by norms of the adult population. Teachers, the representatives in a public school system who most embody these norms and values, receive constant critical challenge from adolescents and this can be stressful to a severe degree.

6. The three teachers in this study developed a strong social conscience during the late 1960's and early 1970's. Needless to say, this was an unsettling time in the recent history of our country. As Phillip expressed so well (28/19), he entered the profession to help this country work with a group of youngsters towards a vision of a better society that was born over this time period. The difference between that vision and the reality of junior high school in the early 1980's is clearly problemmatic for Phillip and the other interviewees.

Given these observations, several courses of action seem appropriate to pursue in accordance with the information surfaced in this study. The appropriate steps are research oriented and school based efforts.

Research Efforts

Because the research reported in this work was restricted by age level of the participant and by grade level, two questions arise which if researched would broaden the base of working knowledge concerning the burnout phenomenon.

1. What are the characteristics of burnout for teachers of varying age levels and experience in the teaching profession?

2. Do the causes and symptoms of burnout change across grade level if age of participants and years of experience are controlled?

These questions lead to another potentially fascinating one for research. It has been noted that burnout seemed to effect the participants in this study in different ways. It might therefore be useful to explore if personality and/or cognitive style has anything to do with the way one is affected by burnout.

3. Is there a certain cognitive style or personality type that is more resistent to the burnout phenomenon?

And if this were found to be so, then the research world might be able to guide individuals of a certain age and years of experience into an instructional setting that would be less stressful for them in terms of burnout. This occurrence would be the test of an interactive study involving the three suggested research questions.

School Based Efforts

Once again, the isolation of the classroom teacher in a stressful setting is underscored by the data reported in this study. Remembering that burnout was observed to be systemic in nature, it would seem that a most important recommendation to come from this study would be directed toward how burnout might be defused within the school setting. All teachers spoke to the debilitating effects of negative staff interactions and the strength of having a positive support base within a school. As expressed by the teachers, the negative variables among staff in a school setting tended to submerge whatever a person could do for him/herself. A positive staff support network helped to override the stress accumulating from repeated student interactions. Therefore, the following recommendations seem appropriate and in keeping with these observations, at least at the junior high school level.

> Recommendation 1. Teachers and/or administrators aggressively pursue the development of support networks among faculty within schools (or even between neighboring schools) to discuss issues related to burnout and to take active united steps to alleviate the causes of burnout.

Burnout probably can never be eradicated but as a process, it can be dealt with. It also seems that the phenomenon ought to be approached by a collection of professionals, not individuals alone.

> Recommendation 2. Teachers and/or administrators develop a strategy to systematically replace pervasive negative school attitudes with attitudes more supportive of enhancing human interactions.

This study could be used to work toward these recommendations in at least two ways. A brief questionnaire could be developed from the "causes" and "symptoms" section of this report. That questionnaire could be submitted to faculty to assess perhaps the "burnout level" of a given staff and could be the start of a series of in-service efforts to alleviate the causes of burnout. Secondly, the interviews included in Section One of this report could be used as a focus for discussions among faculty and/or faculty and students that might lead to action steps within a given building.

The possibilities are many. This research will have fulfilled its purpose if teachers and administrators who may read this pause to consider the burnout phenomenon in their own lives and in the lives of their colleagues.. and then be moved to do something about it.

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Appendices

A. Letter to the jury of peers

B. Category of burnout analysis sheet

June 1, 1980

To the reader:

Thank you for agreeing to help in this study. You have been selected because your point of view represents the perspective of a classroom practitioner. The goal of this research is to gain a practitioner's point of view of the phenomenon called "teacher burnout."

Enclosed you will find interviews with Junior High School teachers. The interviews have not been edited. What you will read is just what was transcribed from an audio tape recording. Your task is to read each interview and note the line and page in which the teachers' statements fall under a number of categories. Please note you are selecting and judging the interviews from your informed perspective as a teacher. The enclosed sheets should help you in your recording.

When you have completed this part of your task, we shall arrange to meet as a group and at this time all readers will be asked to come to consensus with regard to the judged categories.

Thank you for your time and effort in this study.

Sincerely,

Charlie Rathbone and Chaunce Benedict

CATEGORIES FOR ANALYSIS OF BURNOUT INTERVIEWS

Reader _____

Interview _____

1. Definition			2. Causes					3. Type			4. Symptoms			5. Efforts to Stem		
p	l		p	l		U	M	p	l		p	l		p	l	

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